Mechanisms

Every individual mind has its own special and characteristic modes of damping down instinctual tension, so as to make possible an adaptation to the external world and thus attain some measure of real satisfaction. In the work of analysis one of the main tasks of the analyst is to learn to appreciate these individual devices for dealing with psychic tension, and it is only by means of this understanding that the content of the neurotic symptom or the lines of character development, and the relation of these two to real experiences, can be unravelled. There are, however, certain broad and general psychic mechanisms which function to a greater or a lesser extent in every mind, some of which are well illustrated in the material of this book.

I shall not be able to give an exhaustive or systematic account even of the more important mechanisms, but will select those illustrated in the available material.[1]

The first and most fundamental mechanism is that already referred to in describing the differentiation of the super-ego within the child's mind, namely *introjection.* This is simply the mental function which is built upon the pattern of actual bodily experiences in the oral phase of development, namely, taking the outer world, and primarily, of course, the parents, into the internal mental life. Descriptively one could say, as I have already shown, that the child comes to behave towards himself as if he were a parent.

In his own phantasy the child does literally take not only the mother's nipple and breast, but the mother herself, and the father, into himself. He loves and dreads them there within him. They are now a part of his own psyche, and yet not himself, not, at any rate, his primitive wish-self.

They, or that part of him which is identified with the parents, remain *parents* even though they be within him. In endless variation of detail, such unconscious phantasies of the parents incorporated within oneself appear in every deep analysis of children and adults, whether normal or neurotic. In psychotic individuals these phantasies come out unchecked into the open, since with the psychotic the mental life has

[1] Some very significant mechanisms will be omitted altogether, such as the mechanism of *undoing,* characteristically found in obsessional neurosis, but also playing some general part in ordinary development.